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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes findings of a 3-year study of the job satisfaction and turnover of home visitors, both professional and paraprofessional, in programs which link families-at-risk for impaired functioning to medical home care and other resources. Specifically, the study examined: (1) home visitor personal characteristics that influence turnover; (2) organizational characteristics that influence job satisfaction and turnover; and (3) the interaction between the home visitor and the organization. The study involved three survey interviews with all (N=46) home visitors employed in a well-established child abuse and neglect prevention program. The survey instrument evaluated the following individual and organizational constructs: satisfaction with work, supervision and pay; overall job satisfaction; positive or negative affectivity; affect toward the home visitor role; satisfaction with life; locus of control; self-esteem; trust versus cynicism; belief in a just world; belief in a benevolent world; neuroticism; dysfunctional thinking; adult attachment; perceptions of work characteristics; and burnout. Responses were analyzed in terms of actual turnover. Job "leavers" were more likely than job "stayers" to report feeling "upset," had higher self-efficacy scores, expressed greater overall satisfaction than "stayers," were less satisfied with pay, and were less satisfied with supervision. (Contains 19 references.) (DB)

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Home Visitor Job Satisfaction and Turnover

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Introduction

Home visiting is a promising health promotion and early intervention strategy for linking families at-risk for impaired functioning to medical home care and for helping to meet their inter-related and varied needs. It is a part of existing programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has been a part of recently introduced congressional bills, and is used in new initiatives of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. The General Accounting Office has recommended giving priority to federal demonstration projects that incorporate home visiting (USGAO, 1990). Child advocacy and professional organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), strongly support home visiting for at-risk families (AAP, 1995). Home visitors, whether professional or paraprofessional, act as teachers, role models and advocates for families promoting healthy family functioning and optimal child development (Breakey, Uohara-Pratt, Morrel-Samuels & Kolb-Latu, 1991). Loss of home visitor relationships through home visitor turnover can have important implications for families in distress.

Job satisfaction is the overall positive affect that members have toward an organization. Managers, psychologists, economists, and organizational behaviorists all have taken an interest in it. While the effect of job satisfaction on employee behavior has not

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been fully explained, job satisfaction has been consistently and significantly associated with employees' stating their intent to resign from employment and actual resignation from their jobs.

Overall job satisfaction can be considered an independent, dependent or intervening variable. As an independent variable, job satisfaction becomes a proxy for unobserved objective factors, and is related to future mobility and other overt behavior. As a dependent variable, it becomes the outcome measure for organizational and individual factors. For this study, job satisfaction was considered an intervening variable that linked independent personal and organizational setting variables with the dependent variable, actual turnover. We hypothesized that personal and organizational setting variables affected job satisfaction and that job satisfaction, in turn, was directly related to whether a home visitor stayed in his/her organization. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between home visitor job satisfaction and turnover.

Method

This study was conducted over three years, beginning in March, 1995, and had three major research questions:

1. What home visitor personal characteristics influence turnover?
2. What organizational characteristics influence job satisfaction and turnover?
3. How does the interaction between the home visitor and the characteristics of the organization influence home visitor job satisfaction and turnover?

This study was conducted as an add-on study to a larger, five year evaluation project which is a randomized clinical trial (Duggan, Buchbinder, Fuddy, Sia & Young, 1996). Our hypotheses were tested utilizing a prospective, longitudinal survey of all home visitors employed in a well-established child abuse and neglect prevention program ($N = 46$). The relative contributions made by (a) the individual home visitor; (b) the organization; and, (c) the interaction between the individual home visitor and the organization were investigated. Data for this study consisted of personal and organizational setting variables for all home visitors employed by the program.

Annual home visitor interviews began in March, 1995 and went to March, 1997. The survey instrument is a modification of an instrument developed by one of the authors for previous research. Reliabilities and validities of the measures utilized in this survey instrument have been published elsewhere (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1997). The instrument was modified slightly to reflect the nature of home visitor work.

Written informed consent was obtained from each home visitor prior to administration of the survey instrument. Groups of home visitors completed the paper and pencil survey instrument at program sites. The survey instruments were distributed, explained and collected by the researchers. Home visitor supervisors were not allowed to examine the completed instruments due to the confidentiality of the survey.

The instrument included measures of the following individual and organizational constructs: satisfaction with work, supervision and pay; overall job satisfaction; positive or negative affectivity; affect toward the home visitor role; satisfaction with life; locus of control; self-esteem; trust versus cynicism; belief in a just world; belief in a benevolent world; neuroticism; dysfunctional thinking; adult attachment; perceptions of work characteristics; and burnout.

Additional organizational and labor market measures included: current net income; ideal income one should receive; perceived alternative

Results

Home visitor personal characteristics did influence turnover. Home visitors who left their jobs were more likely to report feeling "upset" and were less likely to report feeling "proud". Leavers were also more likely to report that they are "often tense or high strung." Leavers had higher self-efficacy scores than Stayers. Leavers were also less likely to agree with the following statements from the Dysfunctional Attitude Scale (Weissman & Beck, 1978): "I should be able to please everyone"; "If I don't do as well as others it means I'm an inferior human being"; "If I don't set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second rate person"; and "People who have creative ideas are more worthy than those who do not." Leavers score higher on self-esteem measures, however, this finding did not reach statistical significance ($p < .06$).

Table 2
Comparison of Stayers versus Leavers on Key Individual Variables

Individual Variables	Stayers ($N = 33$)	Leavers ($N = 13$)	p Value
Self Efficacy (Mean +/- *s.d.*)[a]	6.2 +/- 1.1	6.6 +/- .38	.02
Self-Esteem (Mean +/- *s.d.*)[b]	6.2 +/- .73	6.5 +/- .39	.06
Affective Disposition (Mean +/- *s.d.*)[c]			
"Proud"	8.6 +/- 1.6	6.3 +/- 2.8	.04
"Upset"	2.7 +/- 2.1	3.8 +/- 1.1	.001
Neuroticism (Mean +/- *s.d.*)[d]			
"I am often tense or high strung"	1.6 +/- 1.7	2.6 +/- 2.5	.02
Dysfunctional Thinking (Mean +/- *s.d.*)[e]			
"I should be able to please everybody."	1.6 +/- 2.4	1.1 +/- 1.4	.04
"If I do not do as well as others, it means I am an inferior human being."	.84 +/- 1.8	.07 +/- .27	.02
"If I don't set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second rate person."	1.1 +/- 2.1	.61 +/- .87	.05
"People who have creative ideas are more worthy than those who do not."	1.5 +/- 2.6	.23 +/- .59	.01

[a] Self-efficacy was assessed utilizing six items. The scale ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much). Responses were averaged for one self-efficacy score.

[b] Self-esteem was measured by six of the ten items on Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale. The scale ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much). Responses were averaged for one self-esteem score.

[c] Positive or negative affectivity were measured by Watson, Clark and Tellegen's 20-item scale consisting of ten positive and ten negative affect word with which respondents were asked to indicate agreement. The scale ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), and scores were averaged to produce a single score for overall mood.

[d] Neuroticism was measured by six items from the 12-item Eysenck Personality Inventory Neuroticism Scale. Individuals were asked to indicate their agreement with statements concerning the frequency with which they experience feelings of irritability, nervousness, worry, embarrassment, or guilt. The scale ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), with high scores indicating a greater degree of neuroticism than low scores. Scores were averaged for measures of neuroticism.

[e] Subjects' characteristic mode of thinking was measured by a 22-item condensed version of the Dysfunctional Attitude Scale (DAS), a 100-item instrument that measures dysfunctional cognitions. The condensed version was chosen for the sake of brevity. An earlier study found that the 22 items selected load heavily on the dysfunctional thinking factor. Individuals were asked to indicate their agreement with general statements about life. The scale ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), and scores for the 22 items were averaged to produce measures of dysfunctional thinking.

Organizational characteristics also influenced home visitor job satisfaction and turnover. Overall satisfaction with the work itself was useful in distinguishing between Leavers and Stayers. Leavers were less likely to report that "work gives a sense of accomplishment"; "work is a source of pleasure"; "work is interesting"; "work is respected"; or that "work is pleasant". Satisfaction with pay also distinguished between Leavers and Stayers. Leavers were less likely to agree that "income is adequate" or that they are "well paid", despite comparable net incomes and ideal incomes. Additionally, Leavers were more likely to agree that the pay was "bad".

The interaction between the home visitor and the organization also influenced home visitor job satisfaction and turnover. Satisfaction with supervision was particularly effective in distinguishing between Leavers and Stayers, with Leavers being much less satisfied with their supervisors than Stayers. As outlined in Table 4, Leavers were more likely to describe their supervision as: "hard to please"; "bad"; "lazy"; "interferes with my work"; "gives confusing directions"; " cannot be trusted"; "quick tempered"; "annoying"; and "stubborn." Leavers were less likely to describe their supervision as: "knows job well"; "around when needed"; "knows how to supervise"; "praises good work"; and "tactful".

Reported likelihood of leaving the job within the next 24 months was a strong predictor of actual turnover, with Leavers being five times as likely to report that they were "very likely to leave in the next 24 months" than Stayers ($p < .003$). With respect to demographic variables, there were no statistically significant differences between Leaver home visitors and Stayer home visitors by age, race, gender, education, or marital status. Number of years with the current employer did not differ. However, number of years experience with the present job did distinguish between Leaver and Stayer home visitors, with Leavers having been in their present job an average of 1.6 years, and Stayers an average of 3.7 years ($p < .04$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between home visitor job satisfaction and turnover. Home visitor personal characteristics did influence turnover. Most notably, Leaver home visitors felt more self-efficacious than Stayer home visitors. Organizational characteristics, particularly work characteristics and pay, also influenced job satisfaction and turnover. Home visitors who were dissatisfied with the work itself and the pay were more likely to leave the job. Reported likelihood of leaving also was related to actual turnover. Home

Table 3
Comparison of Stayers versus Leavers on Key Organizational Variables

Organizational Variables	Stayers (N = 33)	Leavers (N = 13)	p Value
Work Descriptions[a] (Mean +/- *s.d.*)			
Mean Score All Work Descriptions	1.2+/-.10	1.09+/-.39	.002
Individual Work Item Scores			
"Gives sense of accomplishment"	1.0+/-.00	.84+/-.37	.001
"Source of pleasure"	.93 +/-.24	.78+/-.43	.002
"Interesting"	.97+/-.31	.84+/-.55	.01
"Respected"	1.0+/-00	.92+/-.28	.001
"Pleasant"	.96+/-.40	.84+/-.67	.009
Pay Descriptions[b] (Mean +/- *s.d.*)			
Mean Score Pay Descriptions	1.3+/-.25	1.3+/-.16	.13
Individual Pay Item Scores			
"Adequate for normal expenses"	1.5+/-.71	2.0+/-.00	.001
"Well paid"	1.8+/-.61	2.0+/-.00	.005
"Bad"	1.3 +/-.83	1.0+/-.70	.04
Net Income (Mean +/- *s.d.*)	$21,160 +/-2947	$17,729 +/-2654	.96
Ideal Income (Mean +/- *s.d.*)	$26,991 +/-7408	$28,181 +/-11,276	.43

[a] Descriptions of work were measured by using two 18-item scales. If the individual was unable to answer, a "?" was used and scored as a 0; if "Yes", it was scored as a 1; if "No" it was scored as a 2. Scores for each scale were averaged. Individual item scores are also presented. Higher scores on the work scale indicated greater satisfaction with the work itself.

[b] Descriptions of pay were measured by using one 9-item scale. If the individual was unable to answer, a "?" was used and scored as a 0; if "Yes", it was scored as a 1; if "No" it was scored as a 2. Scores for each scale were averaged. Individual item scores are also presented. Higher scores on the pay scale indicated greater *dissatisfaction* with pay.

visitors who indicated that they were very likely to leave were, in fact, more likely to leave than those who indicated that they were very likely to stay.

The interaction between the home visitor and the organization influenced home visitor job satisfaction and turnover, most notably in the area of supervision. Quality of supervision is an organizational characteristic and, as such, is a responsibility of managers of home visiting programs. Home visiting programs with supervisors who fail to act as facilitators for their home visitors can expect job dissatisfaction and turnover. It is incumbent upon home visiting program managers to ensure that supervisors are trained to be facilitators for their employees.

When home visitors turnover, human resources are missing that would otherwise contribute to the production of family support services. The resulting loss in production, loss of continuity of family support services, and the need to recruit and train new home visitors can be costly. Costs are also incurred in the form of larger caseloads for remaining workers, as well as family attrition or dropouts. Home visitor turnover is of interest to state and local government managers, policy makers, health and social service planners, educators and researchers who can take advantage of improved information about the reasons for, and timing of home visitor turnover.

Table 4
Comparison of Stayers vs. Leavers on Key Interactional Variables

Interactional Variables	Stayers (N = 33)	Leavers (N = 13)	p Value
Supervision Descriptions * (Mean +/- s.d.)			
Mean Score Supervision Descriptions	1.5+/-.07	1.39+/-.34	.001
Individual Supervision Item Scores			
"Hard to please"	1.9+/-.35	1.6+/-.65	.001
"Bad"	2.0+/-.00	1.7+/-.75	.001
"Lazy"	2.0+/-.00	1.6+/-.76	.001
"Interferes with my work"	2.0+/-.00	1.5+/-.87	.001
"Gives confusing directions"	1.9+/-.35	1.6+/-.77	.001
"Cannot be trusted"	1.9+/-.39	1.6+/-.75	.01
"Quick tempered"	2.0+/-.31	1.7+/-.59	.001
"Annoying"	2.0+/-.00	1.4+/-.87	.001
"Stubborn"	2.0+/-.00	1.5+/-.76	.001
"Knows job well"	.94+/-.35	.84+/-.55	.05
"Around when needed"	.96+/-.18	.84+/-.55	.001
"Knows how to supervise"	.93+/-.24	.76+/-.59	.001
"Praises good work"	1.0+/-.00	.85+/-.55	.001
"Tactful"	1.0+/-.31	.77+/-.44	.01

* Descriptions of supervision were measured by using two 18-item scales. If the individual was unable to answer, a "?" was used and scored as a 0; if "Yes", it was scored as a 1; if "No" it was scored as a 2. Scores for each scale were averaged. Individual item scores are also presented. Higher scores on the supervision scale indicated greater satisfaction with supervision.

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